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Special meeting on the global food crisis
Provisional summary record of the 9th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 22 May 2008, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. Dapkiunas (Vice-President) ..... (Belarus)

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In the absence of Mr. Mérorès (Haiti), Mr. Dapkiunas (Belarus), Vice-President took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Statements by Member States, agencies, funds and programmes (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Ali** (Malaysia) said that the convening of a special meeting was a clear indication of the importance attaching to the global food crisis; he hoped that the international community's concern would be translated into political will and practical policies.

2. To meet that challenge, it was important to identify the real causes of the crisis, particularly the systemic ones. In his view, there were two main causes: increased subsidies in the North and greater privatization; and the fact that many developing countries had been persuaded to pay less attention to agriculture, leading to a smaller share of national budgets for agriculture and inadequate agriculture-related infrastructure. While it was true that increasing demand from countries with emerging economies had contributed to the food-price increase, such causes were not actionable; people living in such countries could not be asked to consume less food.

3. The complexity of the issue called for conceptual clarity. Since the crisis was inextricably linked to agriculture, discussions about it should be held within the overarching framework of sustainable development, the three pillars of which were economic development, social development and environmental protection. The key principles of sustainable development — particularly shared but differentiated responsibility — must therefore apply. In other words, while developing countries must make every effort to overcome the challenge, the developed world must shoulder the bulk of the burden. Conceptual clarity was also critical if the world was to avoid such pitfalls as addressing the issue piecemeal, linking the crisis with issues only tangentially related to it, using the crisis to advance ideas for which there was no intergovernmental consensus, such as the so-called "responsibility to protect", and using the issue for political and economic ends.

4. The United Nations had a key role to play and must make use of its convening power, unique moral authority, and system-wide resources and expertise. In that connection, he welcomed the recent establishment of the United Nations Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis. However, the Organization must not focus solely on the humanitarian aspects of the crisis; it must also address the systemic issues in a coherent and coordinated manner, making full use of each agency's expertise, while respecting each agency's mandate. At the same time, the agencies must not use the crisis to raise their profiles and expand their bureaucracies; those affected by the crisis must not become pawns in a bureaucratic game of chess. Malaysia supported efforts to convene a special session of the General Assembly aimed at reaching international consensus on how best to tackle the issue.

5. For its part, Malaysia had taken a number of measures to address the crisis. They included establishing a committee to address increasing food prices; setting aside over $1 billion to finance its food-security policy; importing over 500,000 tons of rice for its stockpile; raising the guaranteed minimum price for rice growers; identifying unused land for food production; and announcing a zero-wastage policy for food and fuel.

6. **Mr. Loizaga** (Paraguay) said that over 40 per cent of his country's population lived in rural areas and earned their living from farming, and over 90 per cent of exports were generated by the rural sector. Indeed, as a net food exporter, Paraguay made a significant contribution to the provision of food for the rest of the world. Its high ratio of food exports per capita did not, however, pose a threat to domestic food security, since higher farm incomes and productive diversity ensured greater food security in both the countryside and the city.

7. With regard to biofuel production, Paraguay was committed to diversifying its energy sources in favour of renewable sources that not only had a low impact on the environment, but also helped boost small producers' incomes. The production of ethanol fuel from sugar cane, currently the country's main source of biofuels, had significantly reduced Paraguay's high dependency on imported oil.

8. Any analysis of the factors affecting food production and pushing up food prices — among them agricultural subsidies in developed countries and the impact of climate change in developing countries — must take account of the unsustainable rise in oil prices and the consequences thereof for the most vulnerable and dependent economies. Landlocked developing

countries such as Paraguay already paid 20 per cent more for imported oil owing to additional transport costs; now transport costs themselves were rising. As a result, Paraguay's producers were facing higher costs and, in some cases, were being forced out of the market.

9. The global food crisis must be the subject of a comprehensive, scientific and sector-wide study that addressed the causes and effects of the crisis both globally and nationally and proposed ways and means of overcoming the crisis, softening the impact of rising oil prices on the most vulnerable, and removing such underlying factors as agricultural subsidies and trade barriers. For energy-dependent countries, it was important that rising oil prices were addressed at the same level as alternative sources of energy.

10. **Mr. Talbot** (Guyana) said that the Council had an important role to play in responding to the global food crisis. The current discussions must be used to forge a coordinated and effective strategy for addressing the crisis, to guide the work of the United Nations Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis, and to contribute to the outcome of the upcoming High-level Conference on World Food Security.

11. The many factors underlying the crisis included the relative decline in investment in agriculture and rural infrastructure, climate change, the depletion of global food reserves, the diversion of agricultural production from food to biofuels, record oil prices, and the global trading regime. Both the immediate and longer-term effects, however, would be felt most severely by the most vulnerable segments of the world's population.

12. The crisis offered the international community an opportunity to address structural and other causes and take appropriate action. Such action should take account of the challenges already faced by developing countries and complement their own efforts to manage the crisis. Increased resources for emergency relief were a priority in the immediate term. In the medium and long terms, however, greater and sustained investment in agriculture was needed. The international response should therefore include measures to support such investment and suitable arrangements for agriculture in a fair global trading regime. The international financial institutions should provide concessional credit for small producers as a way of increasing agricultural production and sustaining more farmers' livelihoods. Consideration should also be given to establishing a special fund for food security, so as to facilitate access to technology, new and resistant varieties, and training for small-scale farmers.

13. While some biofuel policies had admittedly contributed to the crisis, his Government's prudent approach ensured that biofuels helped solve, rather than aggravate, the development challenges facing developing countries. His Government's policy was that no existing agricultural land would be used to produce crops for biofuels; such production, if and when it took place, would be based on new land.

14. Guyana, although a net exporter of food, was vulnerable to the rising cost of fuel and other inputs needed for food production. His Government was particularly concerned that the crisis could hinder sustainable development and amplify inequalities between and within countries. Measures to soften the short-term impact of the rising cost of basic goods and services on domestic consumers and producers included a gradual reduction in fuel excise tax, zero-rated value-added tax on an extensive list of additional items for vulnerable groups, financial support to contain wheat-price increases, salary increases and a cost-of-living adjustment for public employees, a grow-more-food campaign, diversification of agricultural exports and promotion of rural enterprise and agricultural development.

15. The Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) were urgently seeking solutions. Even though the key to resolving the regional food-security challenge was not fully in the region's hands, action had been taken to ensure adequate food supply and distribution within the region. In the context of the Jagdeo Initiative, which provided the blueprint for collective efforts to revitalize agriculture in the Caribbean, his Government had offered to make land available to CARICOM citizens in an effort to boost agricultural production.

16. There was clearly no lack of awareness of what needed to be done; many measures had been proposed. Guyana endorsed the need for a coordinated and sustained response. It was incumbent upon the Council, in the exercise of its mandate, to generate the means and political will necessary to ensure an adequate response to the crisis.

17. **Mr. Punkrasin** (Observer for Thailand) said that the global food crisis had highlighted problems on

many fronts. While some parts of the world were characterized by advanced agricultural technologies and overindulgence, in others parts of the world farmers lacked the technology needed to boost production and millions of people faced hunger every day. Despite the international community's pledges, official development assistance (ODA) was on the decline. The international community had not done enough, particularly for Africa. It could not guarantee basic requirements such as food and water, let alone achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

18. The food crisis had not occurred in isolation, but was inextricably linked to climate change, water problems and soaring oil prices, among other things. Developing-country farmers were planting less and producing less owing to escalating fertilizer and energy costs. An in-depth study was needed to determine whether the oil-price increase was purely market driven or partly due to speculation, and how much the rocketing price of oil added to the price of food. Food security and energy security must go hand in hand. Many countries, including the world's largest economy, were facing rising living costs owing to oil dependence.

19. Despite the fact that Thailand was the world's fifth food producer and top rice-exporting country and that the world price of rice was on the rise, Thai farmers were still poor. His Government had adopted His Majesty the King's philosophy of a "sufficiency economy" and new theory in managing land and water resources for agriculture. Sustainable development began with sustainable production and consumption.

20. His Government welcomed the measures put forward by the Secretary-General, in particular the establishment of the United Nations Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis. He hoped that the Task Force would incorporate the views expressed into the proposed plan of action to be discussed at the upcoming High-level Conference on World Food Security.

21. **Mr. Ehouzou** (Benin) said that the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), among others, had been ringing alarm bells about the global food situation for a long time; it was a shame that those warnings had not been heeded earlier.

22. The causes of the crisis were complex and varied, and ranged from diminished supply to speculation. They included greater demand in general — and specifically for biofuels — ever-higher energy and transport costs, and the inequity of the international system, as seen in the farm subsidies, tariff regimes and technical barriers that placed developing-country farmers at a disadvantage. In addition, developing countries had liberalized their agricultural policies and eliminated rural support structures, leaving small farmers defenceless against international market forces. Farmers urgently needed assistance in the form of seeds for the next harvest.

23. His Government was confident that the international community would undertake in-depth reforms aimed at complementing the national efforts of countries affected by the crisis and ensuring global food self-sufficiency. To that end, investment in agricultural production should be increased, in particular in such areas as infrastructure, water management, better access to inputs for small farmers, effective marketing systems and appropriate storage facilities. The search for regional solutions, including South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation, should be stepped up and the share of agricultural assistance in ODA increased. Benin welcomed the pledges made in that connection, but hoped that additional pledges would be made at the High-level Conference on World Food Security to be held in June. The United Nations Task Force, meanwhile, should focus on concrete actions. One idea it could examine was that of establishing, within the United Nations system, a global reserve of basic necessities.

24. His Government hoped that discussions on the current crisis would not become a matter of routine; there was no point having meeting after meeting. The international community needed to act fast to solve the crisis and use the current opportunity to reflect on long-term action.

25. **Ms. Rodríguez de Ortiz** (Observer for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that it was not the price of fuel that had caused the food shortages in many developing countries but rather the economic models imposed by the developed countries to serve their interests. In 1995, although the average price of oil had fallen to $15 a barrel, the global price of grain had risen by 50 per cent. International financial institutions clearly had failed to take into account that agricultural production would be affected by a decrease

in arable land and water and an increase in erosion and land degradation.

26. To solve the food crisis, its root cause must be addressed: too often, development financing was accompanied by conditionalities that restricted the right of each State to pursue policies that defended the rights and welfare of its people.

27. For its part, the Venezuelan Government was restructuring the agricultural and rural sectors to ensure food security. In the context of South-South cooperation, a treaty on sovereignty and food security had recently been signed by the members of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA). It provided for food complementarity based on each country's food requirements. In addition, at a regional summit on sovereignty and food security held recently in Managua, Venezuela had put forward a set of proposals to finance agricultural production. It urged the newly established Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis to take the summit declaration into consideration. It also encouraged the Task Force to take steps to protect biodiversity and balance food and biofuel production in its quest for sustainable food security.

28. **Mr. El Moujahid** (Observer for Morocco) said that vulnerable populations expected concrete measures based on a thorough assessment of the causes of the food crisis, namely the subsidy policies adopted by large agricultural producers; the policies of international financial institutions, which did not promote food sovereignty; the reduction throughout the 1990s of official development assistance for agriculture; climate change; and the increased demand for foodstuffs by large States with emerging economies.

29. Recommended solutions included increasing resources to promote long-term food self-sufficiency, establishing information systems for food security, strengthening regional cooperation and reorganizing regional markets.

30. Morocco advocated the establishment of a multilateral fund to encourage regional capacity-building and technology transfers and to assist developing countries in adapting to climate change. It also encouraged more effective North-South cooperation especially to tackle climate change.

31. **Mr. Belle** (Observer for Belgium), speaking on behalf of the Commission on the Status of Women, said that the food crisis had a disproportionate effect on women and girls, as they comprised the majority of the poor. Recalling that women played a critical role in food-crop production and the preservation of land and water resources, he stressed the need to involve them in the search for solutions by ensuring their general empowerment.

32. **Mr. Khoc** (Sudan) said that the response to the food crisis must cover short-, medium- and long-term goals. He welcomed the establishment of the United Nations Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis but stressed that it must share the outcome of its work with Member States and allow for a transparent debate.

33. The Sudan called on the international community, particularly the developed countries, to respond to the emergency appeals for funding from the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). For its part, the Sudan was strengthening its social-services network and subsidizing small farmers. It was also promoting an ambitious agricultural-development programme to diversify the economy and counter an excessive reliance on oil.

34. The crisis had exposed the inequality and weakness of the current international system. At the upcoming conference in Doha, participants must make every effort to tackle the challenges facing developing countries and encourage countries to meet their commitments in respect of external debt, official development assistance and technology transfer.

35. **Mr. Frommelt** (Liechtenstein) said that, if the international community did not respond immediately to the food crisis, the implementation of several Millennium Development Goals would be at risk. Many of the factors contributing to the crisis, such as climate change, the rising world population, changing dietary habits and soaring oil prices, were likely to have a lasting effect. It was essential to reinvest in the agricultural sectors of developing countries and bring the Doha Development Agenda to a successful conclusion. States must avoid imposing measures that might exacerbate the rise in food prices, and food supplies needed for humanitarian purposes must be allowed to circulate freely. It was also important to strengthen the capacity of WFP to respond to humanitarian needs by providing non-earmarked

contributions. Liechtenstein had contributed 200,000 Swiss francs to the latest WFP appeal and was ready to consider further support.

36. Liechtenstein welcomed the establishment of the United Nations Task Force and the upcoming High-level Conference on World Food Security in Rome. The conference would help ensure a coherent, inclusive international response to the emergency.

37. **Mr. Fluss** (Observer for Israel) said that, in the short term, it was necessary to ensure that food and sustenance reached the most vulnerable countries. The long-term solution, however, was to provide the means and capacity to produce food locally. That required a multilevel strategic plan and an increased focus on the agricultural sector, the latter having been largely neglected by the international community since the 1970s. The plan should address water-conservation, climate change, drought and trade.

38. Israel was committed to the promotion of agriculture and technological progress and had introduced a draft resolution on agricultural technology for development in the General Assembly, which called on Member States to make agricultural technology and know-how available to developing countries and to increase international research and development. Israel was prepared to work with countries requiring agricultural and water technologies, especially at the smallholder level.

39. **Mr. Lawal** (Observer for Nigeria) said that the importance of coordinated international leadership could not be overstated; he hoped that the newly established Task Force would play an important role in that regard. Although the food crisis was global, African countries were among the worst affected. It was time to focus on agriculture, especially in Africa, which had vast resources but faced daunting challenges.

40. Nigeria welcomed the international community's interest in promoting a green revolution in Africa and encouraged States to mainstream their efforts into the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme, which had been prepared by the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

41. In an effort to revitalize agriculture, Nigeria had set aside $1.7 billion to boost domestic production of food crops during 2008-2011. As a major producer of gas — a main component of fertilizer — it would also welcome increased foreign investment in that area.

42. **Mr. Hagen** (United States of America) said that President Bush had recently announced his intention to spend an additional $1 billion on emergency food aid and agricultural development. The Government intended to mobilize food aid for Africa through WFP and other international programmes and to provide disaster assistance to mitigate the impact of rising food prices on vulnerable populations. Programmes would include emergency nutritional rehabilitation and the provision of cash vouchers to help people purchase food and farm inputs to increase local production. In the longer term, programmes would focus on improving agricultural productivity through dissemination of improved seed and fertilizer, better land-management practices and the alleviation of bottlenecks.

43. The international community must strive to complete the Doha Round in 2008 and remove export restrictions, which prevented food from reaching the most vulnerable and ultimately lowered production by reducing incentives to increase output. It was also important to remove barriers to biotechnology, which could dramatically improve agricultural productivity.

44. The United States was paying close attention to the potential impact of biofuels on food prices and was making substantial investments in second-generation biofuel technologies. It was also working closely with the United Nations and developing-country partners to enhance resilience to the many factors affecting food security, including through the Famine Early Warning System Network. The United States expected the Secretary-General's Task Force to produce a coordinated but flexible response to the food crisis through all relevant United Nations development and humanitarian agencies and would participate actively in the upcoming high-level conference in Rome.

45. **Mr. Kononuchenko** (Russian Federation) said that it was tragic that in the twenty-first century, despite unprecedented development and technological breakthroughs, the United Nations was forced to address a global food crisis and the threat of hunger. An objective assessment of the crisis was needed.

46. His Government believed that the crisis had resulted from an unfortunate confluence of longstanding and newly emerging factors. Among them were increased consumption in developing countries

and decreased production in the countries that were major agricultural producers. The global economy had not been able to adapt to that situation with the flexibility it had shown in the past. Other new factors were the accelerated change of focus in the agricultural sector from food to biofuel production and flows of speculative capital being shifted from financial markets to commodity markets in a sudden and unpredictable way that had ultimately been destructive. An immediate humanitarian response was needed, but it was also necessary to establish the long-term conditions for global food security, and his delegation hoped that the special meeting could start that process.

47. **Mr. Exantus** (Haiti) said that skyrocketing food prices in many countries, including Haiti, had led to street demonstrations which in some cases had turned violent. Through the 1970s, Haiti had been almost self-sufficient in basic commodities, but in the early 1980s it had opened its markets, with the immediate effect of flooding the market with imported corn and rice at greatly reduced prices, eroding its already limited production capacity. Twenty years later, vulnerable groups, which at first had embraced the illusion that they would be able to feed themselves at minimal cost forever, were the main victims of the steep price increases. As a result of those misguided liberalization policies, rural people had flocked to the cities in search of a better life, and currently found themselves spending up to 80 per cent of their incomes for food.

48. Medium and long-term agricultural policies should focus on food security rather than potential for commercial profit. Developing countries, especially the least developed countries, should be given technical and financial assistance to enable them to produce sufficient quantities of food to feed their population without being subjected to global market forces, which did not always operate according to just principles. Markets should be subject to regulation to prevent monopolies and speculation, and agricultural subsidies reduced.

49. The food crisis threatened to erase the progress made thus far towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goal of halving extreme poverty. Although the special meeting was unlikely to put food directly onto the plates of hungry families, it would help to guide the Council in its deliberations on ways and means for an immediate response to the crisis and provide input for the forthcoming Rome summit.

50. **Mr. Al-Najem** (Observer for Kuwait) emphasized the important role of international trade in food security and called for immediate and long-term actions to improve agricultural techniques in developing countries, thereby increasing their competitiveness. States needed to take a fresh look at grain-based biofuels and implement measures to prevent speculation in food commodities.

51. His Highness the Emir of Kuwait had launched a "dignified life fund" to help developing countries combat the current crisis. The Government had made a $100-million contribution to the fund and would continue to work for the well-being of the world's peoples.

52. **Mr. Nendongo Aluteni** (Observer for Namibia) said that the food crisis threatened to reverse the gains made towards the achievement of the Goal on eradication of poverty and hunger, and if not addressed properly, could develop into a threat to international peace and stability.

53. Namibia, an arid country, imported close to half its domestic food requirements. It was therefore alarmed that a number of food-producing countries had already put in place mechanisms to restrict food exports, while some of their citizens were hoarding food in order to influence the market artificially and sell at inflated prices. While the Council should call on Governments to increase their investment in agriculture and expand production, it should also discourage the practice of hoarding food while people starved.

54. Although an emergency response to the crisis was welcome, long-term solutions were also needed. The Government had taken a number of measures to increase agricultural production, including the development of irrigation and initiatives to increase local production, marketing and processing of fruit, vegetables and livestock fodder under its Green Scheme Programme. Agricultural inputs such as fertilizers and quality seeds were subsidized for small farmers, and agricultural-extension services had been decentralized to make them more accessible. However, lack of market access for agricultural products was discouraging to producers in developing countries. He called on the developed countries to remove their trade-distorting agricultural subsidies and conclude the Doha Round of trade negotiations with development at its centre.

55. The recently concluded sixteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development had also focused on the food crisis and whether production of biofuels led to food insecurity. The Council should pursue its deliberations on that topic so as to provide further guidance.

56. **Mr. Alahraf** (Observer for the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that the food crisis was a major cause for concern for the future political and economic situation of vulnerable communities. Humanitarian assistance and a rapid response were needed, along with radical changes to the international policies of the past two decades. Agriculture was the tool to combat poverty and hunger and achieve sustainable development. The rich countries should end agricultural subsidies and open their markets to the products of developing countries. It was important to promote regular investment in agriculture, and the international financial institutions could play a leading role in developing mechanisms to deal with the crisis. Direct investment in agriculture and promoting the role of small farmers was necessary. He commended the actions by the Secretary-General to deal with the food crisis through the establishment of the Task Force, which must not become politicized.

57. **Mr. Valenzuela** (European Community) said that higher food prices were likely to persist in the medium term, as the underlying increase in demand and the relative inelasticity of supply would prevent them from falling back to pre-crisis levels. Accordingly, a number of adjustments in the market management of the European Union Common Agricultural Policy had been made to mitigate the short-term effects of price increases. While the short-term effects of the situation on the global poor were negative, rising prices in the medium to long term presented potential new income-generating opportunities for farmers and could enhance the contribution of agriculture to economic growth. Renewed support to the agricultural sector of developing countries, neglected in recent decades, represented a clear priority for the international community.

58. Considering that three out of four poor people in developing countries lived in rural areas and most depended on agriculture for their livelihoods, rising commodity and food prices could benefit the majority of the poor, provided that the right development, trade and market tools were available. Given that no country was self-sufficient in food production, the right trade policies could make an important contribution to improving the operation of global agricultural markets. The European Union would continue to promote an open trade policy and encourage the elimination of export restrictions. High food prices should also reinforce the commitment of developed countries to reform their trade-distorting farm subsidies through an early conclusion of the Doha Round. Much could also be gained by the integration of regional food and agricultural markets. Insofar as rising prices were attributable to underlying structural causes such as expanding demand from emerging economies or high energy prices, however, agricultural trade policy measures were unlikely to represent an appropriate response.

59. The European Union's global response strategy contained a mix of measures ranging from humanitarian operations and fiscal measures to investment in agriculture and rural development. The coordination of all stakeholders would be a key element of a successful international response to soaring food prices. In order to maximize the impact of the international response, the principles of the 2005 Paris Declaration should be respected by the main donors.

60. **Mr. Ockenden** (Commonwealth Secretariat) said that it was important to emphasize that the food crisis was an issue of human rights as much as it was a question of economics. The right to food was a fundamental human right, and all States had an obligation to cooperate to achieve freedom from hunger and malnutrition. Many Commonwealth members, especially the small island developing States, faced a twin challenge from rising food and energy prices.

61. The policy prescription to meet the short-term challenge should include financial support through the international financial institutions, the obligation for States to cooperate to secure the right to food, avoiding policies which harmed others, for example, subsidies in the developed world, biofuel production and export restrictions, and an obligation at the domestic level to ensure that social-safety nets were well-designed and targeted the poorest.

62. To promote a positive response in regard to the food supply, it would be necessary to conclude the Doha Development Round, promote secure land tenure, invest in infrastructure (both the soft infrastructure of

knowledge and market information and the hard infrastructure of warehouses, roads and ports), give greater priority to agriculture at the national and international levels, including investment in extension services, and boost confidence in markets. History showed that agricultural booms were more short-lived and less frequent than busts, and without assets to smooth the adjustment, many poor farmers did not wish to take risks and had no incentive to increase production, an area where international innovation would be needed.

63. **Mr. Maradona** (Intergovernmental Institution for the use of Micro-algae Spirulina Against Malnutrition) said that the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs attributed the global food crisis to lack of planning and of investment in agriculture over an extended period of time and diversion of natural resources for biofuel production. Higher food prices had radically different effects across countries and population groups, with net food-importing countries struggling to meet domestic demand.

64. At the household level, higher food prices led the poor to limit consumption and further undermined nutritional balance. The Secretary-General had called for fresh ideas and strategies to counter malnutrition, and his organization envisioned that development agencies and the international community would join its endeavour to use the micro-algae Spirulina as an intervention and enrichment tool so that its nutritional benefits could be delivered to the neediest. Malnutrition was a major impediment to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and using Spirulina as a food supplement, because of its high nutritional content, accessibility and affordability, had significant potential in helping to realize a world free of hunger and malnutrition.

65. **Ms. Ritola** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said there was an immediate need for an effective global response that addressed the short- and long-term aspects of food security. Policies promoting biofuels needed to be revisited, trade agreements must be reviewed and better food banks established. Such macro-level interventions had to be integrated with actions at the micro-level.

66. In addition to ongoing emergency interventions, in the previous month the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies had launched a new five-year food-security plan for Africa. With an initial budget of $40 million, 80 per cent of which would be spent on direct, integrated country-level programming, the initiative would benefit over 2 million people. It would also enable 15 Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Africa to develop the capacity, skills and resources they needed to have a lasting impact on food security by reaching at least 20 per cent of the most vulnerable individuals in their communities.

67. It was encouraging that food security was now high on the international agenda; it was time for Governments, as well as the United Nations, NGOs and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, to develop a comprehensive and sustainable solution to the global food crisis.

68. **Mr. Masuku** (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)) said that FAO had recently launched an initiative on soaring food prices to provide technical and policy assistance to the most affected countries, with a view to increasing local production and preventing future crises. FAO had already allocated $17 million of its own resources to the initiative, but meeting the objectives contained in the initiative would require an additional $1.7 billion.

69. FAO had also joined forces with Governments, regional development banks, private foundations and United Nations agencies to include measures to counter soaring food prices in new projects and, in some cases, to reallocate existing funds to address immediate issues. Furthermore, joint assessment missions by FAO, WFP, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the World Bank had been sent to several countries to assess the impact of high food prices and to prepare immediate-response plans. Recognizing that many countries lacked the capacity to prepare national interventions, FAO and other agencies were collaborating with the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development to assist such countries. In that connection, a workshop was currently being held in South Africa to analyse the general situation of groups vulnerable to food security and to provide a regional platform for immediate policy actions to mitigate the impact of the crisis.

70. The High-level Conference on World Food Security to be held in Rome in June had originally been planned for discussion of world food security and the challenges of climate change and bioenergy. However, as food prices had begun an unprecedented

rise, it had become increasingly important for the Conference to debate the food crisis. The recently established United Nations Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis might be considered an appropriate instrument to follow up the outcome of the conference.

71. **Ms. Béavogui** (International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)) said that special attention should be devoted to smallholders, as they represented huge potential for increasing food production and were therefore central to any solution to the current global food crisis and the long-term problems of hunger and poverty. There was an urgent need for measures to boost agricultural production, within a medium-term framework that would enable farmers to increase their productivity and income on a sustainable basis. A three-pronged approach was needed: increased emergency food aid; short-term support for agricultural producers, including the supply of seeds and fertilizer; and increased investment in agriculture and rural development to enhance productivity, promote food security and eliminate the root causes of hunger. IFAD was committed to working with all partners to ensure that agricultural and rural development and food security returned to the development agenda.

72. **Ms. Guidry** (World Bank) said that the next few weeks were critical in addressing the food crisis. Rapid action by the international community was required to deflate the price spiral in world food markets, facilitate an orderly resolution of the crisis and mitigate its impacts. Continued unchecked rises could undermine gains made over the last decade in reducing poverty and malnutrition, while inadequate policy responses could jeopardize years of progress made on sound macroeconomic management and agricultural diversification. The crisis offered a window of opportunity to put in place key medium-term reforms that addressed the underlying causes of the crisis and prevented such crises from reoccurring.

73. Immediate actions were needed to fill the remaining financing gap in the WFP budget and to increase the flexibility of use of those funds; to support the expansion of safety nets and social-protection instruments in poor and capacity-constrained countries; and to stimulate an immediate supply response and ensure that small-scale farmers in low-income countries particularly affected by the crisis were able to plant for the next harvest. Essential medium-term actions to address the underlying causes of the crisis included the re-examining by advanced countries of their policies on biofuels with a view to defusing tensions between energy-security and food-security objectives; improving agricultural productivity in low-income countries so as to lay the foundations of a long-term solution; and building a better functioning international trading system that avoided the recurrence of such crises.

74. The World Bank was working closely with other United Nations agencies and development partners on a common strategy to deal with the food crisis. Its current initiatives included policy advice and support, expedited financial support, and analysis and research to address critical knowledge gaps.

75. **Ms. Brown** (International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)) said that the underlying causes of food insecurity needed to be addressed through increased investment in agricultural research and technology transfer to ensure the sustainable intensification of agricultural productivity. For many years, IAEA had been working to develop isotopic and nuclear techniques to help member States improve food security and achieve sustainable agricultural production in such areas as soil science and pest control. Nuclear techniques in particular were of great socio-economic importance and, combined with modern biotechnologies, provided more efficient ways of improving food availability, accessibility and affordability.

76. **Mr. Hyder** (World Food Programme (WFP)) said that the immediate priority in the current crisis was to feed the hungry. In that connection, WFP managed a global lifeline that, in 2008, aimed to meet the needs of 74 million hungry people in the world. WFP was grateful for the strong response of many Governments to its appeal for an additional $755 million just to meet increased costs caused by higher food and energy prices; however, some 100 million additional people facing poverty and hunger as a result of rising food prices.

77. In the longer term, WFP was prepared to work with Governments as they reformed existing policies to mitigate the current and potential future impact of high food prices. Such cooperation included establishing new food and social-protection systems, establishing food-security and vulnerability monitoring systems,

and providing advice on ways to strengthen national food-distribution programmes and safety nets.

78. The upcoming High-level Conference on World Food Security would review the full range of response measures needed from the international community; partnership and collective action were essential in that endeavour. If crisis-response actions proved successful, stability would return and a stronger foundation would be laid for medium-term measures aimed at boosting agricultural production. In that regard, FAO would play a critical role in helping Governments to ensure that farmers had more secure access to seeds and fertilizer and that significant investment was made in agriculture and rural infrastructure. WFP would support FAO and Governments in that task, building on years of experience in community works and relying on its extensive implementation capacity in the field.

79. **Mr. Glough** (United Nations Environment Programme) said that, parallel to immediate humanitarian needs, the root cause of the current food crisis, namely unsustainability, needed to be addressed. Because agriculture remained the main cause of genetic erosion, species loss and conversion of natural habitats, solutions to the food crisis should also address the ongoing degradation of ecosystems and loss of biodiversity. In addition to supporting food security and acting as carbon filters for pollutants, functioning ecosystems were crucial buffers against extreme climate events.

80. It was neither strategic nor sustainable to focus on one cause or one solution. Just as society invested in social and economic infrastructure, the international community must also invest in nature, including land restoration, integrated water-resources management, and improved soil productivity. Investment in science and technology was also essential, as was disseminating up-to-date information to stakeholders and strengthening ecological literacy to enable people to make decisions that supported sustainable development.

Conclusion of the special meeting

81. **The President** drew attention to the President's concluding remarks, to be distributed in document E/2008/66.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.